

The Algerian Family: Fundamental Issues

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Abstract

The family, as described by Professor Mostefa Boutefnouchet, is “a social construct that reflects the image of the society in which it exists and evolves. In a static society, the family structure remains aligned with it, whereas in a dynamic society, the family transforms in accordance with the pace and conditions of that society’s development.” From this perspective, the present study seeks to examine the key transformations affecting the Algerian family in light of the societal changes witnessed in Algeria—particularly in terms of social and economic structures, socialisation processes, and mechanisms of social control.

Key words: family, Algerian family, fundamental issues.

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1. The evolution of social and economic structure:

The structure of the Algerian family was traditionally patriarchal, especially during the pre-colonial era. At that time, the family was composed of several households forming the foundational nucleus of the *'ashira* (tribal clan العشيرة). In general, "the social identity of Maghreb societies prior to colonisation was organised on multiple levels: the first being the *'ashira*, which maintained the broader social bonds of the community, and the second being the family unit that constituted the foundation of the tribe."¹.

The Algerian family is traditionally extended and composed of several nuclear (marital) families living collectively under one roof—called the "*great house*" in urban settings or the tent among nomads. These households could range from 20 to 60 members or more. Lineage in the Algerian family is patrilineal, as it is a kinship-based (*Agnatic*) structure. A woman's affiliation remains with her paternal family to preserve inheritance along the male line from one generation to another.

The Algerian family is characterised by its indivisibility: the grandfather or father acts as the spiritual leader of the family group, managing the collective heritage and maintaining a unique status that ensures the unity of the family².

Among its other defining traits are equality among brothers and the exclusion of sisters from inheritance, strong cohesion and cooperation among brothers even after marriage, and a strict gender-based division of space and roles³.

The Algerian family also brings together relatives across multiple generations under a single authority in a close-knit communal setting. This family unit was not merely a shared dwelling but also a collective economic enterprise, where all the members, particularly the men, served the land, practised a craft, or managed trade.

The distribution of tasks and roles within the Algerian family was the prerogative of the father, typically based on the number of family members and the scope of activities. Unlike the modern concept of a specialised division of labour, especially in agricultural work, all members participate collectively in various seasonal tasks—such as ploughing or harvesting—according to a fixed annual calendar. The crops produced vary by region and climate, including cereals, fruit trees such as olives in the Kabyle region, dates in the southern region, and livestock farming in the steppes and high plateaus.

The Algerian family was also characterised by caution and preparedness for potential economic crises, often resorting to saving methods specific to each region, such as *matmoura* المطمورة (earth silos), *makhzen* المخزن (storage), or *qalla* القلة (clay jars). Any surplus production was then directed toward internal or external markets⁴.

The Algerian family, particularly those engaged in agricultural activities, is also known for strongly encouraging childbirth, especially the birth of male children. Males are considered a vital source

of labour in farming and are seen as a means of increasing the family's strength and social standing. The ideal family is one with many men.

Solidarity within such families is deeply rooted in how inheritance is passed down and the centralisation of decision-making power and family responsibility. Inheritance—including money, property, homes, and furnishings—is traditionally transferred collectively and undivided to the members of the extended family unit. The division of inheritance occurs only in cases of absolute necessity or exceptional circumstances⁵.

The Algerian family underwent a series of transformations, acquiring new characteristics and losing others. French colonialism played a significant role in triggering these changes. One of its main strategies to destabilise and fragment the Algerian family was to undermine its foundational pillar—land ownership. Through calculated and aggressive measures, colonial authorities seized Algerian lands, most notably through the "Sénatus-Consulte" law of 1863. This law transferred previously state-owned lands under the Beylik system (before 1830) into French hands. Approximately 31,739 hectares of fertile land were inventoried under this law, with 70.8% allocated to colonial settlers (colons) and only 19.7% remaining with Algerians.

This led to mass displacement, as evidenced by the classification of 5,232 out of 8,822 Algerian landowning families as "illegally settled".⁶ during the "Sénatus-Consulte" inventory. The loss of land landmarked a turning point in the fate of the Algerian family, as the land was not only a source of livelihood but also central to its identity and cohesion. This essential resource forced Algerians to seek employment on colonial farms or migrate internally and abroad for factory work. From the 1920s onwards, shantytowns began to emerge on the outskirts of cities such as Algiers and Annaba—early signs of the collapse of traditional rural Algerian society.

This fragmentation disrupted the family's foundational nondivisibility; paradoxically, it also embedded itself in the collective memory of displaced communities. Under new conditions, this sense of familial unity would re-emerge in different forms and at various levels of adaptation.⁷

The War of Liberation was among the most challenging periods endured by the Algerian family. Faced with a new reality imposed by the revolution, Algerians had to adjust their attitudes, behaviours, and interactions with unfolding events. Algerian women were called upon to fulfil their revolutionary duty alongside men in this context. As mothers, sisters, and wives, they bore a significant share of the hardships and sacrifices—ensuring the family's cohesion, providing for its subsistence, raising children, and tending towards agricultural duties without husbands, sons, and brothers.

Moreover, driven by a deep and active faith, many women recognised their responsibility for religion and country, standing firmly beside men on the front lines of honour. They joined the ranks of the mujahideen as nurses, support workers, and even fighters⁸.

Thus, the Algerian revolution, which promoted unity and solidarity among the people, led to the emergence of new values within the family structure—most notably, the entry of women into the workforce to support their families economically. At that time, prevailing social norms considered the man's exclusive duty to provide for the household, whereas the woman's role was confined to domestic

responsibilities. A woman working outside the home was perceived as compromising her husband's honour and dignity and even undermining his masculinity.

During the War of Liberation, and as part of the total warfare strategy adopted by the French army, rural areas were systematically emptied of their inhabitants to prevent the revolutionaries from receiving any support from the local population. The mass displacement of villagers into regroupment camps and their forced relocation to urban centres became another significant factor contributing to the disintegration and fragmentation of the Algerian family⁹.

However, according to Nafissa Zerdoumi, *"Despite the turbulent history imposed by the Algerian revolution, the Algerian family remained steadfast and rooted in its authenticity—not because it benefited from any specific religious or legal protection, but because it chose a defensive structure that was distant from the factors likely to alter it. This structure contained static elements capable of absorbing the successive and often contradictory influences resulting from the political and social conditions imposed by colonialism during that period."*¹⁰

Nevertheless, this statement remains somewhat relative due to the ambiguity surrounding the "static elements" mentioned. As analysed by Frantz Fanon, the Algerian family went through multiple phases and successfully adapted to each phase. This adaptability, in itself, reflects the strategic resilience of the Algerian people¹¹.

The connection to the revolution profoundly impacted the Algerian family's structure, functions, and prevailing patterns of relationships. Gradually, perceptions shifted—men's views of women changed, as did the relationship between parents and children. Although this change was relative, it nonetheless marked a real turning point in intrafamily relations. The War of Liberation fractured the once cohesive and homogeneous environment of the Algerian family. Moreover, the prevailing value system within the family began to lose legitimacy, prompting each individual to seek a personal and independent set of values¹².

After independence, the Algerian family experienced profound social and economic transformations. To better understand these changes, it is essential to consider the conditions that accompany them. Postindependence, Algeria inherited a heavy material and moral legacy, burdened with deep-rooted problems. Algerian society underwent a significant transformation in its social structures and relationships compared to the pre-independence period. It no longer maintained its former internal communal composition but instead came to embody a set of dualities—social regression and progress, particularism and universalism, tradition and modernity—all of which became defining traits at both the individual and collective levels¹³.

Sociologist Addi Lahouari encapsulated these societal shifts in the phrase *"It is the persistence and transformation of patriarchal culture within individuals' behaviours, the new roles they perform, and the social positions they occupy."*¹⁴ Despite these sociological changes over the years following independence, patriarchal culture persisted in its core principles—honour, sanctity, and the value attributed to the family domain. However, this culture no longer played the same overt roles as before; instead, it began to function more subtly and indirectly in managing social relationships.

Thus, the social reality shaped by these developments became an inescapable lived experience. Once the cohesive social structure disintegrated at its core, no firm or genuine structure emerged to reestablish this collective social unity. The momentum of social progress and the legacy of the War of Liberation redefined Algerian society, shaping a new identity driven by a clear collective desire for social emancipation. Moreover, economic development proceeded along new foundations, differing significantly from those of previous generations¹⁵.

Algeria thus experienced profound economic, social, and political transformations, most notably industrialisation, modernisation, and urbanisation. The country has adopted several development policies related to education, agriculture, industry, and housing. These were accompanied by significant processes, including urbanisation, geographic and social mobility, the expansion of wage labour in both the public and private sectors, and the implementation of social security systems¹⁶.

Among these changes, urbanisation has been the most significant and impactful indicator of Algeria's social transformation since its independence. Once defined by austerity, productivity, and social equilibrium, rural society began shifting over the past three decades into an urban society characterised by consumerism and aggressive individualism. This new urban structure brought about a society marked by social stratification, where success became measured by social status, comfort, and wealth, often at the expense of social equity, with monopolies over wealth, power, and social space becoming more prevalent¹⁷.

Given these transformations' magnitude, scope, and intensity, assuming that the Algerian family remained unaffected would be a grave mistake. Like the society it belongs to, the family underwent profound changes, becoming increasingly different from what it was at the beginning of the 20th century—and even more so compared to its form during the colonial era.

The essential markers of this dual transformation—of family and society—include the dissolution of collective organisation and the loss of traditional family-based economic indivisibility. Ultimately, this shift led to the fragmentation of the extended family structure and the diversification of family income sources, signalling a transition from the extended family model to the nuclear family¹⁸.

This type of family structure—the nuclear family—has also emerged in modern Western societies alongside their civilisational progress. Its development coincided with the Industrial Revolution of 1789. For instance, France experienced three distinct phases in the evolution of family structure between 1830 and 1990:

- The first phase, from 1830 to the Second World War, was marked economically by the dominance of agriculture and a patriarchal family model.
- The second phase, from 1948 until the oil crisis of the 1970s, was characterised by industrial development and wage labour. The prevalent family type was the *conjugal family*, where the man was the primary breadwinner while the woman engaged in domestic work or provided supplementary income.
- The third phase, continuing to the present day, is defined by the growth of the tertiary sector and the emergence of *dual-earner families*, where both spouses contribute financially.

Thus, the patriarchal family aligned with the agricultural economy during the first phase, the conjugal family with industrialisation and wage labour in the second phase, and the dual-income family with the expansion of the service sector in the third phase¹⁹.

Several sociological theories have addressed the study of the family, especially in its dynamic form. Some of these theories even predate the formal emergence of family sociology itself. Among them is Émile Durkheim's theory, which is credited with introducing the concept of the *conjugal family* (nuclear family) into sociological discourse. From his evolutionary perspective, Durkheim summarised the transformation of the family through what he termed the "law of contraction." According to this view, the family contracts because its relationships become limited to a few cohabiting individuals, increasingly centred on the marital bond. Once a son marries, his ties with his parents diminish and take on a more individualistic nature—focused on personal autonomy²⁰.

Similarly, Talcott Parsons argued that the relative isolation of the small nuclear family fits the normative values of the industrial system. He emphasised universality and individual achievement, suggesting that an extended kinship structure would hinder individuals' geographic mobility²¹, which is necessary in industrial societies.

Although Algeria exhibits this type of nuclear family structure, it does not precisely correspond to the Western model—neither in its defining features nor in proportion relative to other existing family forms.

Algerian families, in general, exhibit a variety of forms and types to the extent that sociologists find it challenging to assign a single defining label to them. Some refer to them as extended or composite families, whereas others describe a hybrid family model encompassing multiple configurations. For example, a study conducted by Fatima Oussedik in the neighbourhoods of Algiers identified five distinct family types, categorised as follows²²:

- New Extended Patriarchal Family: Includes the couple, their unmarried children, their married children, and their young grandchildren.
- Reduced New Patriarchal Family: Comprises the couple and their unmarried children.
- Conjugal family: This family consists of the couple and their children.
- Reduced Conjugal Family: Children living with one parent due to divorce or widowhood.
- Quasi-Conjugal Families: These include the couple and their children, but due to housing shortages, they reside with the wife's family.

This difficulty in defining a consistent pattern for the Algerian family is not limited to sociological researchers; governmental and nongovernmental statistical agencies also encounter it. For example, the National Office of Statistics (ONS) in Algeria has not established a precise definition of the family. Instead, it categorises families into four basic types regardless of whether they are nuclear or extended:

1. A family composed of a husband, wife, and children.
2. A family composed of a husband and wife without children.
3. A single-parent family is composed of only a father or mother.
4. Other types of families.

Despite this classification, it remains insufficient, as it does not account for many other family configurations. To address this gap, the ONS incorporates the broader concept of the "household" (البيوت) to capture these additional family types. With this approach, the ONS ultimately identified 15 different types of Algerian households.

From these definitions and classifications, sociologist Boumakhlouf Mohamed concluded that Algerian families generally fall into three primary categories²³:

First Pattern: The nuclear family comprises a husband, wife, and children or a single-parent unit.

Second Pattern: The extended family, which includes two or more nuclear families, is sometimes accompanied by other individuals and is typically bound by kinship ties.

The third pattern involves asemi-nuclear or expanded family,consisting of a nuclear family that lives with individuals outside the immediate family. In some studies, this is called the "expanded family."

This inconsistency and diversity in the Algerian family's forms can be attributed to its lived reality—caught between preserving traditional values rooted deeply in the collective memory of many individuals and adapting to the modern environment in which families now live. This environment pushes families to seek a clear, defined, and suitable model that enables them to cope with rapid social transformations, which have begun to shape new modes of living.

Economic growth has led to noticeable changes in family culture, traditions, and behaviours—such as consumer habits and increased reliance on paid labour—which has fostered the independence of nuclear families and individual family members. One of the most significant transformations has been the role of women. Once confined to domestic duties, Algerian women have gradually entered the workforce—not just occupying ordinary jobs but also increasingly accessing socio-professionalpositions that were once the exclusive domain of men. Improvements in women's educational attainment supported this shift.

As a result, employment is no longer solely about economic necessity; it now represents the logical outcome of a long educational journey and a means of asserting one's identity in society. Women's entry into the political, legal, and judicial spheres is a prime example of this evolution. The proportion of married working women has risen annually—from33.1% in 1989 to 52.42% in 1996—indicating that Algerian families have become increasingly accepting of women's work outside the home.²⁴.

Moreover, economic transformation has impacted kinship systems. Once the primary framework for solidarity and mutual aid among extended family members, tribes, or clans, kinship ties weakened. They can no longer withstand the demands of the modern family structure. As more individuals have transitioned into paid employment—not only in cities but also among rural populations through internal migration—the structure of family life has shifted. Migration often involves the nuclear family and extended family members such as parents, siblings, uncles, and families of married sons.

Typically, urban settlements for migrant families initially rely on strong solidarity and cooperation within the extended family. However, this model gradually becomes unsuitable in the face of new individual aspirations and changing life demands, leading to residential independence and eventual separation. The growing number of family members also contributed to this fragmentation.

At this point, it is possible to identify the key factors and dynamics that have driven transformation in the migrant family unit²⁵.

The dynamics of change in Algerian families stem from structural predispositions inherent in the family unit. The intersection of three essential aspects shapes these:

- The social structure of the family
- The demographic structure of the family
- The social organisation of the household

On the other hand, the factors driving change refer to the new circumstances and developments that surround the family—numerous and diverse—the most significant of which include the following:

- The independence of families from one another
- Improved economic conditions
- Urban exposure and influence by ideals of individual freedom, away from the authority and constraints of the extended family
- The gradual decline in solidarity rooted in primary relationships
- The increasing involvement in the pursuit of luxury and nonessential goods

Marriage, as the cornerstone of the Algerian family structure, has also been affected by the broad transformations experienced by society. Although some conservative regions still adhere to the traits and characteristics of traditional marriage, the overall approach to marriage has evolved due to several factors, such as the rising educational level of individuals, increased opportunities for direct interaction at work, in universities, and public spaces, the influence of the media, and the diversification of communication methods and tools. These factors have increasingly made marriage a personal matter concerning the two partners rather than a decision involving their respective families.

Consequently, couples often become familiar with each other before marriage, which has led to a decline in consanguineous marriages. Additionally, the average age of marriage has increased, increasing singlehood rates. In 1977, the percentage of unmarried individuals within the reproductive age group (15–49) was 27.1%. By 1998, this percentage had risen to 49.6% in the same age group. Moreover, the delay in marriage has contributed to a reduction in the size of Algerian families due to a decrease in birth rates, which fell from 45.02% in 1977 to 22% in 1998²⁶.

Among the other transformations experienced by the Algerian family is the emergence of a range of issues that were either previously unknown or at least not as visibly prevalent. Pathological symptoms have started to surface as the nuclear family—now the primary social environment for the modern individual—has become increasingly unable to clearly define an individual's role and social position in the way the extended family once did. As a result, individual desires, shaped by personal experiences, play a central role in shaping behaviours and attitudes, particularly when they conflict with the expectations imposed by society²⁷.

2. Socialisation Within the Algerian Family

Socialisation encompasses all activities and mechanisms individuals learn behaviours, values, norms, traditions, and skills. The family is the primary and most influential social unit responsible for

shaping the individual, particularly during the early stages of life. Within the family, the child learns to speak, think, behave, and acquire the qualities necessary to become a social being through the internalisation of societal culture.

While there is a consensus on the universal role of the family in socialisation, this does not negate the existence of specificities that vary from one society to another. Even within the same society, socialisation processes regarding content, methods, and objectives may shift over time.

The Algerian family, in particular, has developed unique modes of socialisation characterised by distinctive practices, goals, and stages that have evolved across different historical and societal periods.

In the extended family, a child was raised not to distinguish between the adult family members responsible for their socialisation. It was considered improper, for example, for a child to favour their mother over their uncles' wives—requesting something from her but not from them or obeying her while disregarding them. The child's relationship with uncles was also undifferentiated; they were expected to follow and respond to their guidance as if they were extensions of the father. In this context, emotional bonds between the child and parents were diminished in favour of broader affiliation with the entire family unit. The individual's identity was tied entirely to the collective family identity, as society would refer to a child not by the name of their father or mother but by their broader family lineage.

This unified approach to socialisation reinforced the unity of the extended family. Given the limited economic resources of the time, the family's survival depended on maintaining a specific mode of production, consumption, and social upbringing.²⁸ Despite high levels of illiteracy, children are raised in environments filled with love, emotional support, and moral fulfilment. At the same time, they are taught the values upon which society was founded—honour, solidarity, and loyalty.

Socialisation within the Algerian family aimed to shape individuals whose behaviours and thinking aligned with the prevailing social order. Roles were predetermined, leaving little room for behaviour driven by personal desires or individual impulses. Social relationships are based on predefined familial roles and divisions of labour, each with a specific title: father, mother, brother, sister, elder, younger, male, or female²⁹. These roles require different methods of value transmission depending on the child's gender.

From an early age, boys and girls were directed toward their respective future societal roles. Boys were socialised for authority and leadership, emphasising strength, honour, masculinity, and wise management. Girls, by contrast, were raised with the understanding that their destiny was marriage and transitioning into their husband's household³⁰. Accordingly, their upbringing focused on values and practices such as:

- A woman's value within the marital household was primarily determined by her ability to bear children. An infertile woman was often rejected, and even those who bore only daughters were looked down upon. Algerian society was, and in many ways remains, patriarchal, where the male child is venerated while the female child is devalued. Consequently, the family became a system of glorifying the male and marginalising the female. Girls often suffer from neglect and injustice, whereas their brothers enjoy rights and freedoms³⁰.

- Girls were taught that their role was to raise children, obey their husbands, and participate in serving all members of the husband's family. They internalised the notion that man holds authority and the final say in all matters, and thus, they were expected to obey him and meet his needs.

- They were also trained to manage household responsibilities with precision and care, including cooking, cleaning, maintaining food supplies, and learning traditional domestic crafts, such as weaving, pottery, and animal husbandry, to contribute to the family's economic well-being.

- A woman's honour was tied to her chastity, particularly her virginity before marriage. This concept of honour extended beyond the individual—it was considered a reflection of the family, especially the reputation and dignity of the father and brother.

During early socialisation, the child was not confronted with multiple and conflicting role models, nor did they struggle to determine which model to imitate or upon which to build their identity. The individuals whose behaviour the child emulated did not differ significantly from one another in terms of personality or social standing. Furthermore, the behavioural norms the child internalised—through commands and prohibitions, rewards and punishments, praise and disapproval, and imitation—were not limited to the household environment. These values have extended seamlessly into other areas of social life, including mosques, streets, and various work environments, such as agriculture and other community activities³¹.

The Algerian family traditionally showed little inclination toward educating its children—particularly girls—based on the belief that a woman's natural place was within the home. Fears of colonial influence also reinforced this attitude, as the French colonial authorities were seen as promoting a culture that contradicted the values and traditions of Algerian society. In response, enlightened figures and resistance leaders, such as Ibn Badis and members of the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars, recognised the importance of education and took the initiative to establish independent schools across the country. These schools emphasise women's education within Islamic morals and values³². Despite these efforts, the colonial restrictions on education resulted in extremely high illiteracy rates—95% among men and 98% among women³³. This widespread illiteracy significantly impacted the Algerian family, further entrenching traditional gender roles and limiting opportunities for change.

While the traditional Algerian family, through its socialisation process, once prepared individuals for smooth societal integration—shaping their character traits, training them to fulfil their roles, and helping them understand their status simply and harmoniously with the broader societal system—this model of familial socialisation has not remained unchanged. The emergence of various factors, such as demographic growth, industrialisation, urbanisation, wage system expansion, educational development, intercultural exposure through diverse media platforms, and evolving legal frameworks recognising the rights of women and children, has significantly impacted the traditional family. As a result, socialisation within the family has transformed and now manifests in three distinct forms.³⁴

- **Conservative Style:** This approach continues the traditional method, aiming to socialise the child into fixed roles and statuses to reproduce the prevailing societal system. It is often referred to as *widespread socialisation* and is commonly practised in rural and semi-urban areas. This style involves a

clear gender division: the mother is responsible for raising the daughter, whereas the father handles the son's upbringing. Adherence to family traditions is mandatory, and any deviation is met with strong disapproval and resistance.

- **Liberal Style:** This method is adopted by families that have rebelled against traditional upbringing approaches, seeking to free themselves from all restrictions, including religious teachings. However, few families apply this style, and Western cultural models typically influence them.

- **Scientific Style:** Recently adopted by some families, this method is based on a belief in the scientific findings and evidence provided by research in education and socialisation. These families apply—or partially apply—modern pedagogical methods in raising their children.

However, these models remain idealised and rarely materialise fully in reality. Families are not subject to the same influences or present the same resistance levels to change. As such, family transformation does not occur linearly—where the traditional family seamlessly transitions into a new, unified structure with consistent functions. Instead, diverse family forms that are influenced to varying degrees by modernity while simultaneously preserving elements of traditionalism emerge. Therefore, the socialisation process does not follow a fixed path or a single model; a family may oscillate between forms or even adopt two contradictory models simultaneously.

Traditional and modern families do not always coexist as distinct entities; each has a unique structure and boundaries. Every family form incorporates varying degrees of both tradition and modernity. Therefore, just as it is challenging to categorise and standardise the diverse patterns of family life, disentangling the overlapping values that families transmit to individuals through socialisation is equally problematic ³⁵.

3. Social Control within the Algerian Family

A social phenomenon cannot be studied without its broader sociohistorical context. Therefore, before delving into the nature of social control within the Algerian family, examining the societal reality in which it emerged and evolved is essential.

Like other Arab societies, Algerian society is generally traditional and tribal. The tribe constitutes the most prominent social and geographical unit for groups sharing a common origin. Within the collective consciousness of its members, the tribe represents an enduring bond—based on blood, alliance, or contract—for which members are willing to make the most significant sacrifices to preserve. Three fundamental components characterise the tribe:

- The mosque symbolising religious authority;
- The fortress represents economic strength and serves as a military symbol;
- The Council of Elders (Al-Jama'a الجماعة) is a body composed of the oldest and most respected male heads of families within the tribe. This council functions as a social organisation rooted in blood ties or alliances, and geographical boundaries mark its authority.

Jama'a acts as an advisory council where tribal issues are discussed respectfully, often interspersed with Quranic verses. Their deliberations are based on codified agreements recorded in writing, reflecting a form of customary law grounded in traditions and accepted behaviours—those to be followed and those

to be avoided. Naturally, this legal framework helps maintain both material and moral order within the social group, preserving behavioural homogeneity, which is crucial in sustaining social cohesion.

This cohesion is reinforced by the spiritual legacy of the pious ancestors, whose wisdom continues to guide and discipline the group, even after their passing. Through this ancestral heritage, the tribe maintains equilibrium, harmony, and solidarity.

Jama ‘a manages tribal affairs, legislates, adjudicates disputes, oversees the mosque and fortress, allocates land among families, monitors and preserves moral conduct, administers justice, and ensures the implementation of rulings. In essence, the Jama‘a embodies collective public opinion and upholds the core values accepted across generations—from ancestors to descendants—values that are considered indisputable³⁶.

Spiritual and moral values within the community are more important than material values, which are relegated to a secondary position in life and social relationships. What truly matters to the group members is preserving the spirit of *baraka*, a Sufi religious concept. The essence of this belief lies in seeking God's favour so that His blessing (*baraka*) is not withdrawn from human life.

To attract *baraka*, an individual must exhibit virtuous behaviour: uphold promises, avoid deceit, and maintain honesty in buying and selling. All of this feeds into the notion of *honour*, a fundamental value in the moral system. The group's honour is not inherent but acquired and amplified over time through complete adherence to the value system.

This perspective reveals the foundation of honour: the individual does not defend themselves as a mere person but as a representative and member of their community. While the principles of submission and social interdependence constrain personal freedom, the individual does not experience this as coercion. Instead, maintaining social solidarity is seen as a vital principle for the individual and is more meaningful than expressing personal identity or individualism³⁷.

The kinship structure is another foundation of social control within the traditional Algerian family. Kinship strengthens the cohesion of family members and fosters their unity and solidarity in both prosperity and adversity. It encourages the performance of all tasks through a collective sense of responsibility, motivating each member to feel accountable toward other relatives within the family group.

The kinship system also compels individuals to adhere to the norms and values recognised within the family, thus contributing to preserving the family's honourable image. Everyone knows the family's honour, religious and social implications, and collective rights and duties. Consequently, any commendable behaviour by a single member brings pride to the entire family, whereas any misconduct reflects negatively on all of them.³⁸

Social control within the Algerian family is also shaped by paternal authority, which is essentially a product and reflection of the broader society and its culture. The father, within his household, represents the oversight of the “community” (collective conscience) and acts as the legitimate and sole custodian of its value system (customs and traditions). The authority of the elders within the tribal council has

facilitated the emergence of paternal authority within the family and reinforced the dominance of the male group over the female group.

As a result, the father is often compelled to exercise authoritative control over the family since any leniency or neglect on his part may lead to intense criticism from both the immediate family and the larger social group—such as the tribe or clan. Consequently, family leadership is traditionally entrusted to the eldest male, who is considered the wisest, most experienced, and most capable of understanding the needs and responsibilities of the family.

This individual oversees the family's internal and external affairs, makes decisions regarding its interests, manages the production process, and maintains familial unity and solidarity. He resolves internal disputes, enforces adherence to family traditions and values, and encourages respect through obedience while promoting solidarity to serve collective interests. He also assigns tasks among family members and, upon ageing, delegates his responsibilities to the next eldest male.

In addition to the previously mentioned factors supporting the process of social control within the Algerian family, physical factors have contributed significantly. As an economic unit, land imposes a form of cohesion, solidarity, and cooperation among individuals, where the individual's livelihood is directly tied to that of the collective. Consequently, each member was compelled to conform to the norms dictated by the group, represented primarily by the father's authority. This was precisely due to the land's importance in maintaining the unity of the Algerian family and preserving its customs, traditions, and identity, which colonial powers targeted for expropriation.

Another physical factor contributing to social control was the shared family dwelling (the "big house"), which kept all family members under constant observation—primarily by the head of the family and secondarily through mutual surveillance among members. This constant presence and oversight deterred any behaviour that might violate family values or bring dishonour to the household.

Customs and values are not fixed; they evolve. The renowned scholar Ibn Khaldun emphasised the transformation of conditions among nations and generations, stating, "The conditions of the world, its nations, their customs, and beliefs do not remain constant; instead, they change over time and from one state to another."³⁹ Accordingly, Algerian society has undergone numerous social and cultural changes across all levels and institutions, including shifts in social values and norms.

These foundational societal transformations have affected various aspects of daily life, from traditional large family homes to modern apartments, from a political organisation based on tribal councils to municipal governance, from collective economic consumption to individual consumption, and from customary law to civil law⁴⁰.

What is particularly distinctive about Algerian society is the coexistence of traditional social systems alongside new, modern systems. This reflects society's difficulty in fully transitioning from a structure dominated by social control rooted in blood ties, ethnicity, and affiliation with narrowly defined solidarity groups—bounded by time and place—to one that actively engages with its environment and adapts to the challenges and pressures of a culturally diverse and constantly evolving setting with new standards, values, and social meanings⁴¹.

Ibn Khaldun also emphasised that changes in social customs and values occur through a selective process, wherein certain traditions of past generations are preserved, others are abandoned, and new elements are introduced based on the realities of succeeding generations. He states:

"...The common cause for changes in conditions and customs is that the habits of each generation are tied to the habits of its ruler; as the saying goes: 'People follow the religion of their king'... Therefore, as long as nations and generations succeed one another in power and rule, changes in customs will inevitably occur...⁴²,"

The general transformations witnessed by society led to profound changes in family life, allowing for a more independent life and the assimilation of new values that broke with traditional pressures. The extensive geographical movement of family units resulted in a decline in kinship relationships in favour of broader and more intense external connections. The urban dwellers began to focus all their mental and physical energies on facing complex and challenging circumstances, giving little regard to their ancestors and relatives⁴³. This reduction in kinship relations led to the disappearance of collective loyalty and cohesion, weakening the social control inherent in the family, which shifted towards individual freedom. The main axes of these new trends can be drawn as follows: the main dimensions of these new trends can be summarised as follows⁴⁴:

- *-Public authorities have increasingly intervened in family law.

- *-The modern state uses legal and administrative mechanisms to keep statistical records of its citizens.

- *-Individual and marital advancement is often achieved by denying the autonomous status of spouses.

In addition, new actors have emerged—those who, through improved education and access to prestigious professional positions, no longer limit their expectations to mere protection, sustenance, and preassigned social roles. Instead, they increasingly demand autonomy, independence, and self-actualisation through new roles and statuses.

Consequently, maternal authority within the family has grown at the expense of paternal authority. Mothers acquire real decision-making power within the household, often shouldering responsibilities such as shopping and tracking price fluctuations⁴⁵. Moreover, making major family decisions, including marriage and divorce. This shift marked a decline in patriarchal culture and a redefinition of traditional roles⁴⁶.

Once bound by social norms and external opinions, youth now enjoy greater freedom in their choices and no longer feel compelled to adhere strictly to traditional rules. Many now make major life decisions—such as marriage—independently, even in the presence of their fathers. This is especially true for those with higher education or stable careers, which provide them with financial autonomy. Similarly, young women are increasingly consulted, and their consent is sought, reflecting a broader trend toward individual agency and egalitarian decision-making within Algerian families.

Conclusion:

The prevailing reality today is that the patriarchal translation of values, traditions, and social norms—which is deemed permissible or forbidden—once firmly instilled by the family is gradually challenged by a new, more pragmatic and objective value system. This evolving value system is shaped mainly by increasing educational, cultural, and professional exposure and contact with global cultures—not through active creation but passive adoption and imitation.

However, this transformation does not imply a complete rupture with traditional ways of life. The Algerian family remains, in many respects, rooted in its traditional social framework. Despite the influence of modernisation and contemporary lifestyles, the collective memory of generations still carries remnants of the past—values such as cooperation, solidarity, support for people experiencing poverty, help for those in distress, generosity, and hospitality continue to resonate deeply within Algerian familial life.

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 - The term "household" (*le ménage* البيت) in French, as used by the National Statistics Office, refers to an introductory statistical unit. It is defined as a group living in a single dwelling and generally sharing their primary responsibilities, including meals. These individuals are typically related by blood. A household can consist of one person, one family, or several families. The head of the household (either a man or a woman) is a resident who manages and decides on the use of funds and is recognised as the household head by the members or acknowledged as the leader. In its sociological meaning, a household encompasses both a material aspect (the dwelling) and a social aspect (the people living in it). Furthermore, in the social structure, the household is the smallest social unit after the clan and tribe.
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